

ARTICLE APPEARED
ON PAGE 132

WASHINGTONIAN
June 1983

LOOKING FOR TROUBLE

STAT

DICK BAST Didn't Become Washington's Toughest and Richest Private Eye by Playing It Safe

BY RUDY MAXA

I never minded a little trouble.

—Sam Spade, in *The Maltese Falcon*

It was dusk on a May night in Washington, and the President's adviser was confiding his fears to the private eye. The two men sat outside, on patio furniture near the detective's backyard pool with its small fountain in the center. A few feet away, hidden among the azaleas, a tiny microphone picked up the splash of the fountain and the desperate conversation.

"The President is scared as hell, especially when he's weak and under attack," said the White House confidant. "He's afraid to alienate the military or the foreign-policy establishment. . . . If this happens with us, it could happen to any President."

As the night air turned cool, he wove a bizarre tale of the President held captive in his Oval Office, paralyzed by high-ranking conspirators in intelligence circles whose power he dared not challenge. Was this some kind of quiet coup, some kind of real-life *Seven Days in May*? asked the private eye.

"Could have been, could have been," mused his visitor. "I can't say there was a conspiracy to do it, but I will say that was the practical consequence of their actions."

Charles Colson was in trouble on that May evening ten years ago. The Watergate maelstrom was consuming Washington, and Colson, once one of Richard Nixon's top aides, was under indictment in the scandal's cover-up conspiracy case. He wanted someone to prove that the CIA had had a hand in his misfortune.

"What is exculpatory for me," said Colson, "is if I am able to expose the fact that there was a major plot by the CIA and they were responsible for the cover-ups throughout the investigation."

It was a long shot, but Charles Colson was in big trouble. So much trouble that, like others before him, he thought only one man could help: Dick Bast, Washington's toughest private eye.

You're absolutely the wildest, most unpredictable man I've ever known. Do you always carry on so high-handedly?

—Brigid O'Shaughnessy to Sam Spade

Dick Bast has some of the handsomeness of a '50s movie actor, tall and lean with dark, slicked-back hair, a scar above an eyebrow, and a chiseled nose with flat tip. He talks in a growl and peppers his conversations with four-letter words. At age 50, he still has a tension about him, a force field that suggests violence and anger. He displays none of the world-weariness that might be expected of a man who got his start 25 years ago by breaking down doors of cheating spouses for divorce lawyers.

Since then, when there's been trouble, there's been Bast:

■ When the FBI couldn't locate a call girl involved in the Bobby Baker scandal in the mid-'60s, Bast found Linda Morrison and produced her for Washington reporters who wrote about her parties with defense contractors and government officials.

■ During the Lyndon Johnson administration, Bast orchestrated the hottest divorce investigation in town, recording conversations between married socialite Barbara Howar and Senator Birch Bayh and surprising her with cameramen as she lay in bed at a Jamaican resort with a White House official.

■ Retained by a lawyer for Abscam defendant Senator Harrison Williams, Bast last year befriended Cynthia Marie Weinberg, estranged wife of the con man who had snared legislators in the FBI sting. Before her death, Marie Weinberg told Bast that her husband, Melvin Weinberg, had lied under oath, altered an Abscam tape, and pocketed federal funds meant to bribe political targets.

■ When arms merchant Edwin Wilson was on the lam in the Middle East, Bast visited him in Tripoli and turned over to Jack Anderson tapes that included Wilson's claims that while on the CIA payroll he had worked as an international representative for the seafarers' union and as an advance man in Hubert H. Humphrey's 1964 campaign.

— That kind of review makes Bast smile. Sometimes he investigates out of his own sense of righteousness. Bast has turned over to the Justice Department information about a Mafia bagman ready to squeal on higher-ups: evidence of illegal bugging of two CIA officials allegedly involved in a gay affair (Bast was outraged by the bugging, not the affair); evidence of a federal judge and his courtroom staff erasing on-the-record com-